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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RPO DUBAI 000379

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SUBJECT: IRAN: KHAMENEI SAYS SYSTEM WILL "ACT DECISIVELY" AGAINST
OPPONENTS

REF: DUBAI RPO 378

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CLASSIFIED BY: Alan Eyre, Director, Iran Regional Presence
Office, Department of State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: On September 11 Supreme Leader Khamenei gave the main Tehran Friday Prayer sermon. In his comments Khamenei sought to characterize his treatment of opposition in line with the practices of both the first Shia Imam Ali and also with that of his predecessor Ayatollah Khomeini. He said while criticism within the framework of the existing political system was acceptable, those fundamentally opposing the system and seeking to harm the nation's security will be dealt with decisively. In keeping with previous warnings about the "soft overthrow" of the existing order, he cautioned against dissolution from within, saying that the only way to prevent this was to remain true to religion, revolutionary principles, and to Khomeini's teachings.

The recent Presidential election with its massive turnout proved to the world that "regardless of whom the people voted for" they still believed in the system. Referring to Iran's position on the international stage, Khamenei said Iran took pride in standing against the oppressive nature of its enemies and that Iran wouldn't be cowed into relinquishing its rights, "nuclear or non-nuclear." He called for a large turnout on the September 18 Qods Day march in support of the Palestinian people, although warning that this event should not be used to "sow dissension," an implied reference to the fact that "Green Path" oppositionists are reportedly seeking a massive turn-out on this day as a show of strength.

12. (C) SUMMMARY (CONT): Although Supreme Leader Khamenei 's tone was consistently mild, Iranian press and IRPO contacts have interpreted this speech as a clear warning to the "Green Path" oppositionist leaders to cease and desist, an interpretation reinforced by the contemporaneous release of a Judiciary panel report stating that Mehdi Karrubi's allegations of prisoner abuse were both baseless and also politically motivated, and the forwarding of this case to judicial authorities for possible prosecution (reftel). END SUMMARY.

13. (U) On September 11, Supreme Leader Khamenei gave both Tehran Friday Prayer Sermons (normally there are two, the first covering ostensibly religious topics, the second focusing more on issues of the day). As the date fell on the anniversary of the martyrdom of Imam Ali, the first Shia Imam, the topic of his first sermon was the government of Imam Ali. Although putatively non-political in nature, Khamenei used this sermon to

set the stage for themes to which he would refer back in his second, political, sermon. He pointed out the moral nature of Imam Ali's government, adding that "when religion is separated from politics, politics becomes immoral and secular." In an implicit comparison with current times, he also stressed that Imam Ali consistently preferred to be lenient in dealing with those who opposed him, until and unless there was a threat to the system, at which point he would act decisively.

TYPES OF CONFLICT

14. (U) In the start of his second, political speech, Supreme Leader Khamenei said he wished to address his remarks to those in Iran's political sphere. Dissension had been a feature of the Islamic Republic since its founding. These conflicts have had different causes, to include theoretical differences of opinion, conflicts of interest and clashing personalities. Referring implicitly to his comments on the management style of Imam Ali, Khamenei said that Khomeini's normal method for dealing with dissension and conflict was to use moderation and leniency. In an implicit reference to Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karrubi, each of whom has referred back to his own revolutionary credentials, Khamenei said that at times Khomeini had to deal with conflicts even with those who had solid revolutionary backgrounds, at the level of the Prime Minister (i.e. Mousavi himself), President (Khamenei himself) and even at levels above the President (a reference to Khomeini's dismissal of Supreme Leader-designate Ayatollah Montazeri).

15. (U) Khamenei said the system didn't seek to stifle those who "think differently" (note: 'digar andishan,' a term used to refer to the intellectual current associated, inter alia, with the Khatami-ist 'Second of Khordad' movement). It was good for Iran's officials to have critics point out weaknesses if those

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doing so act within and accept the basic principles of the system, and the government will not move against such criticism.

16. (U) However, again drawing the link to Imam Ali, Khamenei said that during Khomeini's time if there were danger of infiltration of "harmful principles" into the system, and if this conflict were in some way a threat to core principles, Khomeini would then "act decisively." The regime, much like any human being, had to defend itself against such an attack. Linking his actions to those of Imam Ali and Khomeini, Khamenei said that today also the regime will act if it senses that someone is acting against its principles and security.

AVOIDING CORRUPTION FROM WITHIN

17. (U) In keeping with recent dominant public warnings about "soft overthrow" and "soft wars," Khamenei turned to the theme of corruption from within, both at an individual and societal level. At an individual level, deviation from principles and susceptibility to corruption were to be avoided at all costs, as small slips and mistakes could lead to larger ones in a slow and gradual process. The cure for such threats is self-awareness, piety and the ongoing moral policing of friends and family. If such impiety is happening to a government official the problem is worse, as it affects society.

¶8. (U) At a societal and governmental level, deviation from principles and susceptibility to corruption can happen in much the same manner. The decay comes from within, and although on the outside the society can still appear like an "Islamic Republic," on the inside it could suffer degradation and decay.

In this regard, societal dynamics can either be positive or negative. Positive dynamics means moving ever closer towards justice and religion, which improves social, political and economic conditions and also improves society's abilities to stand up to one's enemies. But a society with negative dynamics will have growing class and social differences and worsening political and economic conditions. Instead of using freedom for growth, such a decaying society will abuse freedom to pursue corruption, sin and dissension. Such negative dynamics also cause the society to "feel weak and retreat" in the face of one's enemy, unilateral disarmament and relinquishing one's rights, nuclear and non-nuclear, which is another sign of societal decline.

ELECTION

¶9. (U) Supreme Leader Khamenei said the June 12 Presidential election with its massive turnout was a glorious triumph for the Islamic Revolution. The turnout demonstrated to the world that the Iranian people believed in their system of government now more than ever, "regardless of who voted for whom. After the election, the enemy sought to create disturbances in order to diminish Iran's achievement and weaken the peoples' confidence in the system, but to no effect. There will be similarly large turnout in future elections, Khamenei predicted, showing the ongoing support of the people.

IRAN'S ENEMIES

¶10. (U) Supreme Leader Khamenei said all governments have enemies, but what is important to note is the nature of one's friends and enemies. Iran's friends are Muslim nations and peoples throughout the world, and the oppressed of the world. Its enemies are the thieves and oppressors of the world, and Iran should not be scared to be the enemies of the U.S. and the U.K. It was important for Iran to show strength in the face of such enemies.

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QODS DAY

¶11. (U) Supreme Leader Khamenei said that many on the global stage have tried to bury the issue of Palestine, but Iran has prevented that, a fact which has upset "the U.S. and the Zionists." He called for a massive turnout of support on the September 18 Qods Day Rally in Tehran, and cautioned all that no one should use this event to sow dissension, an implicit reference to "Green Path" opposition plans to use this authorized march as a show of its own strength.

¶12. (C) COMMENT: Although his tone was mild, Iran oppositionist press in addition to IRPO interlocutors with ties to the "Green Path" opposition have said that, in the words of one source, "Khameni's speech was being viewed ominously in Iran," especially when viewed in conjunction with the contemporaneous release of a Judiciary panel report stating that Mehdi Karrubi's

allegations of prisoner abuse were both baseless and also politically motivated, and forwarding the case to judicial authorities for possible prosecution (reftel). According to one executive branch official, Khamenei's speech has made "the specter of the arrest of Karrubi - and possibly even Mousavi at a later stage" all the more probable.

¶13. (C) COMMENT (CONT): Contrary to Khamenei's assertions and as evidenced by recent comments by IRGC Commander Jaafari, the regime's interpretation of legitimate dissent has constricted dramatically, with Jaffari equating "soft overthrow" with those seeking to change Iran's behavior in any way. Certainly, Khamenei seems to be trying to regain the high ground he forfeited by descending so openly into the political fray, as shown by his attempts to draw comparisons among himself, Khomeini, and Imam Ali. Separately, the Supreme Leader's formulation of "relinquishing ones rights, nuclear or non-nuclear" as a sign of societal dissolution and immorality indicates that Iran will continue to adhere to its hard public line in advance of any future negotiations. Finally, it is also worth noting that Supreme Leader Khamenei made no endorsement, either explicit or implicit, of President Ahmadinejad, saying only that the recent Presidential election was good due to the turnout, "regardless of who voted for whom." END COMMENT.
EYRE